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ART. X.—1. *The Poetical Works of WINTHROP MACKWORTH PRAED.* New and enlarged Edition. New York: J. S. Redfield. 1859.

2. *The Etonian.* Second Edition. London: H. Colburn & Co., and Knight and Dredge, Windsor. 1822.

3. KNIGHT'S *Quarterly Magazine.* London. 1823–25.

EVERY one who has been a boy—a term we may soon attempt to explain—must at times regret the absence of a true picture of his youthful feelings and aspirations. A genuine boy is certainly no bad representative of the common idea of the chivalric hero of romance. The same belief in the supernatural, the same timid and unselfish worship of womanhood, the same dreamy anticipations of possible dangers to be overcome, the same sense—all-untrustworthy though it be—of the possibility of a cause and a moment which shall nerve the frame to deeds transcending ordinary powers, are common to both. And yet, while the Knights of the Round Table and the quest of the Sangreal are immortalized by the poet, who can point out a similar embalmment of the fellowship of youth, or of the simple devotion of a boyish soul in quest of the source of truth? That we can indicate but one or two such chronicles may be our excuse for calling attention to their existence, and for adding our feeble attestation to their fidelity to nature.

But recently we have heard the cheery voice of “Tom Brown,” as he related the story of his school life at Rugby; and as we recognized in his simple narrative the spirit of a boy maintaining his youthful fire and freshness untrammelled by the acquired restraints of his later life, we acknowledged therein the strongest evidence of our conviction that boyhood is a state as distinct and remote from ordinary life, as the days of chivalry, or those dim recollections of the past which the poet idealizes as the realm of fancy.

There is an affinity between boys of all ages and countries which disdains local bounds and customs; and hence we trust the picture we shall endeavor to draw of an English community more than thirty years ago will receive the attention

of those who can appreciate the scene only by that fine channel of sympathetic communication which we have indicated.

The scene of our story is Eton, that most renowned of English schools, and our hero is the poet Winthrop Mackworth Praed. His name at once challenges our attention, as showing an affiliation to that sturdy Puritan stem which has blossomed and borne so fruitfully on our shores. Born in 1802, of a family of good descent, yet sufficiently awakened by the introduction of new blood, and stimulated by the active cares of a mercantile life, to furnish a fair representative of the vigor yet inherent in the English gentry, Praed was placed by birth in a situation calculated to develop that precise degree of genius which he possessed. At the age of eighteen he was the centre of a circle of incipient poets and essayists, and to him probably belongs the credit of devising a means of satisfying their aspirations for an enlarged reputation. School magazines were not unknown; but the predecessors of the Etonian had failed to achieve the success which it commanded. We take up the volumes now, and the first page reveals at once the capabilities and the immaturity of the writers. Thoroughly boyish, the fun barely covered by an attempted dignity, it reads so like what we recall of our own school days, that we start at the recollection that this was thirty-nine years ago, and that the few survivors are by a long distance our seniors.

With the common impatience of fixed rules which characterizes youth, we find that the contributors occasionally varied from the parts assigned them. The pen of the Secretary, however, suffered no such lapse to appear in his record, and each character stands out in bold proportions. The Club and the Editors' Portfolio preserve the record of the imaginary assembly; and whether the members debate the nature of the spirituous compound which shall be honored with their approving vote, or whether they essay to test their talent by fugitive verses and essays, the guiding hand of their chief restraints all within their proper limits. Through every variation of feeling, and on every subject to which their attention has been called, these boys pursue their investigations. One learnedly discourses on poetry, another on the distinction

between politeness and politesse ; one pens sonnets, another epigrams ; but throughout you feel the mesmeric influence of a hearty nature, and of the enthusiasm of a young mind, flushed with its earliest success. Amusing indeed are the attempts at mystification, and the assumption of a fancied importance ; but when his Majesty the King of Clubs indites a friendly letter to his Majesty the King of England, ending with a petition for a holiday, we feel that the boy element is more powerful in the writer than any idea of literary achievement. We laugh at the picture of the petulant debater, whose prematurely learned discussions on morality are interrupted by an outcry against his quotations, which are only justifiable at recitations ; while we acknowledge the similarity between this fanciful dispute and the more sober proceedings of our own learned societies.

We see, moreover, in this little republic of letters a truthful picture of the motives which will hereafter influence its members. An unsubdued honesty reveals the prejudices and unreasonable conclusions of the boy ; the habits of mature life conceal, but do not alter, the mental processes of the man. When the youthful politician of twenty eulogizes one man because he is a Tory, and condemns another because he is a Whig, how unsatisfactory does the reason appear ! Yet wherein does this differ from the controversy produced by that most brilliant History of England by Lord Macaulay ?

Happily, in childhood animosities are as fleeting as friendships afterward become ; and our Club, in giving us a glimpse of the dispute, affords us the satisfaction of witnessing its amicable termination. The bond of unity continues, and its result is seen in the magazine. Did space allow, we should be glad to cite some of these poems, buried now in forgetfulness, but yet as warm and heart-full as though they were assured of immortality. The beauties whose praises are so fervently sung are now beyond the restoring hand of art ; but still the spontaneous gayety of the writer lures us backward, and we behold them as lovely as when he saw in them the realization of his highest conceptions.

Yet, with all this excess of life and gayety, there are not only indications of prospective talent, but those true evidences

of genius which win success and fame for mature years. The poems of Praed are as delicately satirical, his sketches of life are as exact and daintily finished, as any of those productions which afterward placed him in a high position among the minor poets of England. As in the case of Chatterton, it seems marvellous that a boy, whose companions were absorbed in the routine of school discipline and studies, whose fittest pleasures were found at the cricket-ground and the bathing-pools, should have had the penetration to discover those specious deceits of polite society which delude even the actors into a belief in their reality. Yet Praed's first poem in the *Etonian*, in describing the various characters at "The County Ball," gives us a high opinion of his powers of observation. The attentive member of Parliament, with a soft word for each of his constituents, has his mask thus removed. The tender-hearted dame sings his praises: —

"‘ For, when he begged me keep my seat,
He looked so civil and so sweet.’
‘ Ma’am,’ says her spouse, in harsher tone,
‘ He only wants to keep his own.’”

Though the youthful satirist could well discern the falsity of the shallow-minded throng, he was not unprepared with an idea of a virtuous and well-ordered life. Many of his lines show his conviction that truth had not entirely vanished from this mundane sphere, and evince that he had not fallen into the boyish conceit that age was incapable of deserving respect.

Poet and moralist though he was thus early, no one who peruses his prose writings as well as his poetry can fail to observe that he fully appreciated and enjoyed the spring-time of youth, and derived a hearty pleasure from the sports and labors fitted to his age. We can well believe that, as he was remarkable for his attainments in the classics, the ordinary school tasks were not irksome; but when we find him writing from Cambridge of the delight of the owner of "The Best Bat in School," we must concede to him something more than a theoretical knowledge of cricket.

This pleasure in the recollection of his Eton days always distinguished him. Long afterward he wrote of "School and School-Fellows": —

“ Twelve years ago I made a mock
Of filthy trades and traffics ;
I wondered what they meant by stock,
I wrote delightful Sapphics ;
I knew the streets of Rome and Troy,
I supped with Fates and Furies ;
Twelve years ago I was a boy,
A happy boy, at Drury’s.

• • • •
I wish that I could run away
From house and court and levee,
Where bearded men appear to-day
Just Eton boys grown heavy ;

• • • •
And pray ‘ Sir Giles ’ at Datchet Lane,
And call the milkmaids houris ;
That I could be a boy again,
A happy boy, at Drury’s ! ”

We are obliged to wonder at the facility with which he wrote, and the untiring energy he displayed in conducting the Etonian. Though, as we have said, ranking high in his class as a student, he found time to edit the monthly sheet, to which he was the largest contributor. Coleridge, Moultrie, and Walker, all destined to obtain high positions, were his principal assistants ; but that he was the inspiring genius is evident from the fact that the magazine ceased when he left Eton. Years afterward an attempt was made to issue another school magazine there ; but this was rebuked by the London Magazine, “ with the memory of the Etonian still fresh at Eton,—with its exquisite poetry, its playful wit, its keen satire, its precocious knowledge, living in the public, not the local mind.”

With his well-earned honors, Praed commenced a brilliant career at Cambridge, where he obtained an unprecedented number of prizes. In 1823 and 1824 he received the Chancellor’s Medal for an English poem ; in the former year by offering “ Australasia,” in the latter, “ Athens.” His early success was amply sufficient to deter him from idleness at college. In the great Cambridge Debating Society, the “ Union,” he was the opponent and rival of Macaulay. This exercise — a preparatory training, perhaps, for Parliament — did not suffice

for his active mind. Charles Knight, since so well known as a publisher and editor, was induced to commence “Knight’s Quarterly Magazine” in June, 1823, and here the debaters met in friendly rivalry. The framework of the imaginary society by which the work was managed seems to have been the production of Praed, and the active editorial duties must have devolved upon him. The contributors were all described, and their meetings in council were very spiritedly reported. Praed’s favorite character was Vyvyan Joyeuse; and not only was the Magazine warmly praised by “Christopher North,” in “Blackwood,” but Joyeuse was introduced as an interlocutor in the famous “Noctes Ambrosianæ,” a compliment which was rarely paid. Macaulay here gave some of the earliest proofs of his skill as an essayist and as a poet, and, with his fellow-contributors, Moultrie and Townsend, was for a time unsparing in efforts to maintain the position which they deserved. Time relaxed their ardor, and the publisher decided to discontinue the issue, long before the public had ceased to manifest a strong appreciation of the merit of the Magazine.

Praed, having completed his course at Cambridge, commenced the study of the law, still preserving his taste for literature. Knight having projected, in 1826, a weekly sheet, called “The Brazen Head,” he had recourse again to his friend, who cordially joined in the scheme, and, with Barry St. Leger for a coadjutor, essayed the editorial duties. The failure of this enterprise closed his career as an editor, though he long continued to write for the “annuals” and magazines.

In 1830 Praed was returned to Parliament, and at once took his place among the rising men. It seems to us an absurdity to suppose that a prominent orator can be aided professionally by success as a poet. On this side of the Atlantic the prejudice against such learned trifling is too strong to be overcome; and even the political ability of Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, and Macaulay in England affords no hope of any amelioration in our canon of exclusion. The success of Canning had aroused the attention of the English politicians, and we may be sure that it was no hinderance to our author that he was able to satirize his opponents. His “Lines on Seeing the Speaker Asleep” are still remembered and quoted; and as

his talents were certainties, his versatility served to adorn his more sedate qualities. His promotion seemed sure; but after a few busy years spent in Parliament or official station, his failing health compelled him to retire from his employments in 1838, and on the 15th of July, 1839, he died of consumption.

Thus vanished the light of one who had given every promise of a successful career, both in literature and in active life. As with too many who have thus failed to complete the race, his memory has declined, and his reputation has been of that shadowy nature which depends upon the promise of great deeds, rather than on the fulfilment. The noisy march of the aspirants for fame drowns the voice of the fallen, and but rarely is stayed for the erection of a memorial. Those who were regarded as only the equals of Praed have now become the leaders in council, and his claim to his former equality is now, at best, grudgingly conceded.

His old friend, Charles Knight, closed a brief biography of him, some twelve years since, in these words:—

“ The two great speakers of the Cambridge Union, Thomas Babington Macaulay and Winthrop Mackworth Praed, sat on opposite benches when the oratory of sport had become a stern reality. The one has fulfilled all the hopes of his youth; the other—we can only speak of him with unbidden tears.

‘ But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life,— but not the praise.’ ”

From the man, let us now turn to the works of the poet. His chief reputation has been as a writer of *vers de société* and charades; but this is only a portion of his claim. His longer poems—“Lilian,” “Gog,” “The Legend of the Drachenfels,” and “The Troubadour”—are fine examples of the effect produced by interweaving a tale of “faery land” with the more ordinary narration of the actions of mortals. One of these marvellous romances, “The Red Fisherman,” must be placed among the most exquisite poems of modern times.

The Abbot wanders forth to gaze upon the moon, and, intent on his meditations, strays to a place of ill repute, “The Devil’s Decoy,” where

“ The water was as dark and rank
 As ever a Company pumped ;
 And the perch that was netted and laid on the bank
 Grew rotten while it jumped.

“ The Abbot was weary as abbot could be,
 And he sat down to rest on the stump of a tree,
 When suddenly rose a dismal tone, —
 Was it a song, or was it a moan ?

“ ’T was a sight to make the hair uprise,
 And the life-blood colder run :
 The startled priest struck both his thighs,
 And the abbey-clock struck one !
 All alone, by the side of the pool,
 A tall man sat, on a three-legged stool,
 Kicking his heels on the dewy sod,
 And putting in order his reel and rod.

“ The line the Abbot saw him throw
 Had been fashioned and formed long ages ago,
 And the hands that worked his foreign vest
 Long ages ago had gone to their rest :
 You would have sworn, as you looked at them,
 He had fished in the flood with Ham and Shem ! ”

The Fisherman disdains ordinary bait, and his first lure is a diadem.

“ Cold by this was the midnight air,
 But the Abbot’s blood ran colder,
 When he saw a gasping knight lie there,
 With a gash beneath his clotted hair,
 And a hump upon his shoulder.
 And the loyal churchman strove in vain
 To mutter a Pater Noster,
 For he who writhed in mortal pain
 Was camped that night on Bosworth plain, —
 The cruel Duke of Glo’ster ! ”

Again the hook is baited and thrown ; again success follows the temptation. The third essay has the same result : —

“ One jerk, and there a lady lay,
 A lady wondrous fair ;
 But the rose of her lip had faded away,
 And her cheek was as white and as cold as clay,
 And torn was her raven hair.

‘ Ah, ah ! ’ said the fisher, in merry guise,
 ‘ Her gallant was hooked before.’
 And the Abbot heaved some piteous sighs,
 For oft he had blessed those deep blue eyes,
 The eyes of Mistress Shore.”

After many ineffectual trials, the Fisherman puts on a bishop’s mitre, much to the Abbot’s dismay.

“ He signed — he knew not why or how —
 The sign of the Cross on his clammy brow.

“ There was turning of keys and creaking of locks,
 As he stalked away with his iron box.

“ ‘ Fair luck to the Abbot, fair luck to the shrine !
 He hath gnawed in twain my choicest line :
 Let him swim to the north, let him swim to the south,
 The Abbot will carry my hook in his mouth.’

“ The Abbot had preached for many years,
 With as clear articulation
 As ever was heard in the House of Peers
 Against Emancipation ;

“ But ever from that hour, ’t is said,
 He stammered and he stuttered,
 As if an axe went through his head
 With every word he uttered.
 He stuttered o’er blessing, he stuttered o’er ban,
 He stuttered drunk or dry ;
 And none but he and the fisherman
 Could tell the reason why ! ”

Brief as our extracts are, we trust we have shown the melody of the verse and the imaginativeness of the idea. “ The Legend of the Teufel-haus ” is one of those romances of chivalry which convey a great moral. The knight loses his way, approaches a castle inhabited by fiends masquerading as mortals, and refuses to eat unless a blessing is asked. Driven thence, he finds a pavilion, where his whilom lady-love is lying, asleep and unprotected. He resists temptation, and throws his mantle over her couch, as a token that he has been there. The next morning his servants find castle and pavilion vanished, and beneath the mantle lies coiled a venomous serpent. This wild story is told most delicately, but with that curious, half-bantering vein running through it which we notice in so many of his later poems. We should say that his

most striking peculiarity is the almost ludicrous comparisons which he introduces everywhere,—comparisons, however, which are always restrained by good taste, so as to give a quaintness to the style, without furnishing food for laughter.

In his early poems there is a buoyancy which afterward is wanting in his lines. His happiest days apparently were spent at Eton; and he never ceased to recall that early time in contrast with his active career in public life. The interesting sketch which we have from Mr. Willis, of the appearance and habits of Praed when in the midst of his Parliamentary course, confirms our belief that the weariness which oppressed him was no idle fantasy, but the result probably of that gradual decline in the physical powers so often attendant upon an undue development of mental capacity in youth. “The shadow of the grave,” as it has been well termed, often falls upon the destined victim before any other sign of disease; and we do not wonder that a sensitive mind, thus overcast, should seek a relief in dwelling upon the thoughts of days when everything was bright and hopeful. Hence, too, we may comprehend and account for his fondness for children, and his loving appreciation of their natures. His lines to “My Little Cousins” reveal at once his kindly sympathy with their trivial joys, and his conviction of the impossibility of any renewal for him of as simple happiness as theirs.

“ I used to have as glad a face,
As shadowless a brow :
I once could run as blithe a race
As you are running now.
But never mind how I behave, —
Don’t interrupt your play ;
And though I look so very grave,
Laugh on, laugh on, to-day.”

If we turn from his serious pieces to those lighter poems which are now so often quoted, we find a vivacity which may be explained when we know that they were among the first poems he wrote. “The Bachelor,” “The Vicar,” “Quince,” “The Belle of the Ball,” and “My Partner,” have become as familiar and distinct to his readers as any of the heroes or heroines of more ambitious poets. Nay, as they are portraits of the representatives of existing classes, we often find our-

selves describing acquaintances most easily by applying the poetical sketch to them. As the lessons of "The Spectator" still possess a value, since the follies of the day have altered so little within a century and a half, so the existence of ball-room belles as Praed described them affords us a chance to test the accuracy of his description, and compels us to award to him merited praise as a limner.

As a writer of charades, our author has achieved a great success. There is an interest excited by these sportive fancies of the Muse which enables them to maintain their position against those critics who style them puerile follies. One of Praed's charades, "Sir Hilary," has attracted attention ever since its appearance, and is perhaps the poem most frequently associated with his name. On examining the thirty now collected, we are surprised at the skill with which he has embodied an ordinarily prosaic word in a poem of melodious cadence and truly poetic ideas. He stands almost alone in this province, once given up to the most miserable poetasters.

In conclusion we may say, that, while few poets have written purer verse than he, few satirists have done their task with more gentleness. While we laugh at the follies of the day as he portrays them, we feel that the very subject of the picture would read the lines with complacent thoughts, and with admiration at the skill which had individualized him as his own ideal. We will not attempt comparisons with other poets, but we avow our belief, that wherever there shall be found a mind which appreciates the beauty of graceful thoughts and kindly sentiments expressed in flowing lines and melodious cadences, there will be found an admirer of the poetry of Winthrop Mackworth Praed.

Of the present edition we can only say that it contains double the number of poems that had appeared in any previous issue, and has some features which will always render it unique. No collection of Praed's poems has ever been issued by his family, and the warm admiration of the late Dr. Rufus W. Griswold prompted him to attempt to preserve a portion of them. The public has now the result of a similar labor of love, which, we trust, may incite some of the poet's friends to do thoroughly the work to whose performance these efforts have been a necessarily imperfect prelude.